Organized Labor

Labor unions have existed in Michigan since statehood. The Knights of Labor proclaimed itself a union organized for all workers, skilled or unskilled, and succeeded in electing members to the Legislature during the 1880s. This led to the enactment of a variety of labor-oriented legislation, such as the establishment of a Michigan bureau of labor, a compulsory school education law, a ten-hour-day law, a child labor law, occupational safety laws, and a mine inspection law. But these successes were short-lived, and the Knights of Labor virtually disappeared by 1892. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the American Federation of Labor unsuccessfully attempted to unionize workers in the lumber, mining, and furniture industries. A bitter and sometimes violent strike of Upper Peninsula copper miners in 1913 ended with some concessions from management, but without union recognition.

A number of factors combined to encourage the growth of labor unions during the 1930s. Automation in the auto industry steadily reduced the proportion of skilled laborers needed to produce automobiles. In addition, the uncertainties of the Great Depression and the pro-labor New Deal environment revived the dormant labor movement. At this time, the **United Automobile** Workers, which had affiliated with the Committee for Industrial Organization and sought to organize the industry's growing unskilled labor force, began to assert itself. In 1936, the union targeted the General Motors Corporation, initiating a series of "sit-down" strikes throughout the

On December 30, 1936, the most famous of these confrontations, the Flint sit-down strike, began. As the strike dragged on, violence erupted between strikers and police. Governor Frank Murphy (1937-1938), who had just taken office, sent the National Guard to restore order, but refused to direct them to break the strike. Following intense negotiations between management and labor initiated by Governor Murphy, General Motors acquiesced and accepted the UAW as the sole bargaining agent for the workers. Before it ended, this strike and others throughout the country had idled 150,000 workers and closed more than sixty plants in fourteen states. While Chrysler and other smaller auto companies quickly recognized the UAW after brief work stoppages, the Ford Motor Company resisted the closed shop until 1941. The triumph of organized labor signaled a new era not only in American industry, but also in the politics of the Great Lake

Postwar Politics

One of the major developments of the post-World War II years in Michigan was the emergence of a competitive two-party political arena. Beginning with the Depression, the Democratic Party made inroads into what had been a Republican-dominated state since the 1850s. Democrats captured both houses of the Legislature in the 1932 election, lost both in the following election, and regained both in 1936, only to lose both once again in 1938. Labor union leadership, particularly the UAW, became much more active in politics in the postwar era, reflecting that union's interest in social issues beyond the workplace. After a disastrous 1946 election for the Democratic Party in Michigan, a new liberal-labor coalition emerged within the party and eventually wrested control. In 1948, G. Mennen Williams won the first of what would be six terms as Michigan's governor. That same year, a 95-5 Republican majority in the House was reduced to 61-39, while in the Senate, the Democrats gained an additional five seats, going from 28-4 to a 23-9 margin. The electoral support of blacks, whose population had more than doubled between 1940 and 1950, was another crucial factor in the resurgence of the Democratic Party. Beginning in the 1950s through the present day, Michigan politics reflect the characteristics of a highly competitive two-party state.

In national politics, Republican U.S. Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg emerged as one of the nation's foremost spokespersons in the area of foreign policy. During a distinguished career in the U.S. Senate, which began with his appointment in 1928 to fill a vacancy, Vandenberg made a significant and lasting contribution to the quickly evolving role of the United States in world affairs. Originally a staunch isolationist, he became the chief architect of the bipartisan postwar foreign policy that recognized the country's international responsibilities and resulted in such initiatives as the United Nations Charter, the Marshall Plan, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The 1950s

The 1950s marked an era of remarkable growth and prosperity in Michigan. Only Florida and California exceeded Michigan's population growth during the 1950s. The state's school-age population increased by over 50% between 1950 and 1958, straining the state's school system. Public demand led to a great expansion of the state's educational system, including more classrooms and teachers, the establishment of seven new community colleges, and important additions to a variety of higher education facilities.

As a state of both vast and unique dimensions, Michigan historically encountered problems of a geographic nature. Calls for the building of a bridge traversing the Straits of Mackinac and linking the two peninsulas began as early as 1884. The rapid growth of the automobile industry and the construction of Michigan's highway system generated further interest in such a project. In 1923, a state ferry service was established to facilitate traffic between the peninsulas. A report prepared by the State Highway Department in 1928 indicated that a bridge was feasible, but the onset of the Great Depression temporarily quelled enthusiasm for a bridge. Responding to the possible availability of federal public works funds, the Legislature created a Mackinac Straits Bridge Authority in 1934. However, its proposals were rejected by the federal government and the outbreak of World War II once again stalled bridge proponents.

The state's active promotion of overall economic development and the tourist industry also contributed to support for a bridge. An Economic Development Department was created in 1947 to coordinate efforts to strengthen and diversify the state's economy. The Michigan Tourist Council, established in 1945, promoted the state as a desirable destination for vacationers. Businesses related to the tourist industry prospered and efforts to capitalize on the growth continued. In 1950, the Mackinac Bridge Authority was reconstituted and, after the marketing of bonds to finance the project, work on the bridge began in 1954. The Mackinac Bridge officially opened on November 1, 1957, and Michigan's ultimate "internal improvement" was complete.



When the Mackinac Bridge opened in 1957, it represented an engineering marvel as well as the fulfillment of the dream of connecting Michigan's two great peninsulas.

Civil Rights

The struggle for social justice and equality epitomized by the civil rights movement characterized the decade of the 1960s. Racial tensions had erupted into violence on a number of occasions throughout Michigan's history. Indeed, the abolition movement of the antebellum and Civil War era flourished despite the widely held discriminatory attitudes toward blacks. In 1863, following the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation and the initiation of a national draft, riots broke out in a number of cities in the North, including Detroit. As the city's black population increased dramatically in the twentieth century there were other incidents of racial unrest. Housing shortages, prejudice, and segregationist sentiments were instrumental in an outbreak of violence in 1925, when a black physician, Dr. Ossian Sweet, moved into a predominantly white neighborhood. Sweet's family was met by an angry mob of whites gathered outside their home. Shots were fired, resulting in the death of a bystander, and Dr. Sweet and his family were arrested and charged with murder. Although the persuasive arguments of the legendary Clarence Darrow led to the doctor's acquittal, racial tensions remained unchanged. In June 1943, a number of race riots broke out in several cities in the North and West, but the worst was in Detroit. After only one day of sustained violence, thirty-four people had died, hundreds were injured, and property loss was substantial.

There had been progress in Michigan over the years to preserve and protect civil rights. Throughout the state's history, laws were enacted to prohibit racial segregation in public education, to safeguard the demand of equal public accommodations, and to outlaw discrimination in the selection and qualification of jurors. In 1955, a Fair Employment Practices Commission was established to provide remedies for discrimination in employment opportunities. The 1963 Constitution contains strong provisions protecting civil rights, including the creation of a bipartisan **Civil Rights Commission** to investigate alleged discriminatory activities.

These initiatives, however, were not enough. On July 23, 1967, police raided an illegal drinking establishment in Detroit. Bystanders protested the arrests, and soon the nation's worst civil disturbance was under way as an astonished public followed the spectacle via national television newscasts. Before state and federal troops restored a semblance of order, forty-three people were killed, over 1,000 injured, more than 7,000 arrested, and property damage exceeding \$50 million was incurred. This tragedy, one of several urban riots throughout the country, represented just one of a number of violent episodes that characterized the 1960s.

From the ashes of the riot emerged such positives as the **New Detroit Committee**, established to provide a forum for the city's community leaders to discuss the city's problems, and legislation designed to prohibit discrimination in the sale or rental of residential property.

Con-Con

The 1960s also marked a milestone in the development of state government. Michigan's evolution from rural-agrarian to urban-industrial was nearly complete as evidenced by the fact that over half of the state's population resided in southeastern Michigan. The politics of the 1950s had been marked by stalemate and, in part, represented the ongoing conflict between a dwindling rural minority that enjoyed certain political advantages and a growing and restless urban and suburban majority determined to gain a stronger voice. Moreover, a **general dissatisfaction with the governmental structure** of the state led to a consensus among a host of civic organizations that the 1908 constitution was outmoded and the root cause of the state's political immobilization.

A coalition of concerned citizens and reform groups sharing a desire to modernize Michigan's governmental structure succeeded in winning public approval for a revision of the state constitution. On April 3, 1961, voters approved a referendum to call a **constitutional convention**. The margin of victory in this referendum was achieved through majority votes in only Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties; the state's other seventy-nine counties opposed the proposal.

Legislative apportionment was one of the most intensely debated issues addressed by the delegates to the constitutional convention. However, decisions issued by the United States Supreme Court, both during and after the Constitutional Convention of 1961-1962, ultimately took precedence over Michigan's constitutional apportionment provisions. These decisions established the "one person, one vote" principle for state legislatures and had a dramatic impact in Michigan and across the country. Michigan voters adopted the new constitution on April 1, 1963. Among other things, the new constitution strengthened the governor's powers, particularly over the executive branch. In fiscal matters, the new document required balanced budgets and public approval of borrowing while prohibiting the adoption of a graduated income tax.

The decade of the 1960s began with promise, optimism, and great expectations. By its end, a host of social problems such as pollution, drug abuse, crime, poverty, and discrimination, many of which reflected the consequences of rapid growth and urbanization, posed major obstacles to continued progress and prosperity.

Environmental Concerns

If there is one recurring theme that has transcended all of Michigan's historical eras, it is the importance of natural resources to the growth and development of the state. Whether it was the early fur trade, the discovery of mineral deposits, the development of agriculture, the harvesting of the state's forests, or the growth of manufacturing, Michigan's resources have always played an integral role in the state's economy. Of course, the state's most visible and abundant resource is water. The Great Lakes are the largest single reservoir of fresh water in the world, and Michigan's geographic location within their watershed makes its stake in their protection and preservation especially high. In the wake of each wave of Michigan's economic development, there have been important lessons to be learned about the finite nature of the state's unique resources. While **environmental protection** and quality became major policy issues during the 1960s and 1970s, Michigan's involvement with environmental quality and the law can be traced back many years. With the creation of the Department of Conservation (forerunner to the Department of Natural Resources) in 1921, the Legislature recognized the state's responsibility to "protect and conserve the natural resources of the State of Michigan." Michigan's uniqueness has made it a focal point for the consideration of environmental issues. At the same time, the state's economy continues to depend on heavy manufacturing, farming, and tourism. The process of balancing the state's economic interests with this commitment to protect natural resources is an arduous one, but the people of Michigan have taken these lessons to heart.

The drafters of the Constitution of 1963 considered environmental protection important enough to include a mandate in the constitution directing the Legislature to protect the air, water, and other natural resources of the state from pollution, impairment, and destruction. Beginning in 1968 and repeatedly thereafter, the people of Michigan have demonstrated this commitment at the polls. That year, voters approved measures authorizing the issuance of \$335 million in full faith and credit bonds for the prevention and abatement of water pollution and \$100 million in full faith and credit bonds for funding public recreational facilities and programs. Concerns over litter led to the overwhelming approval of a citizen initiative in 1976 to enact a state law to prohibit the use of nonreturnable beverage containers. Michigan became one of the first states in the nation to require deposits for returnable containers. In 1984, the electorate approved an amendment to the state constitution establishing a Natural Resources Trust Fund to be used for, among other things, the acquisition of land for recreational uses or protection of the land because of its environmental importance or its scenic beauty. A \$660 million environmental bond issue approved by voters in 1988 established a fund to clean up pollution sites and to provide money for solid waste management, wastewater treatment, and Great Lakes protection. An additional \$140 million recreational bond issue was approved at the same time to finance state and local public recreation projects. In 1994, the public approved a state parks measure to provide a more permanent funding source for the maintenance and operation of Michigan's ninety-six state parks. Again in 1998, Michigan voters expressed their appreciation for our natural resources by authorizing a major bond program called the Clean Michigan Initiative.

Restructuring and Global Competition

As noted earlier, Michigan's economy has weathered many boom and bust cycles. Early fortunes were made and lost in fur trading, mining, and lumbering, but the state always rebounded. The 1970s presented another difficult challenge to the state when the OPEC oil **embargo** led to a sharp 23 percent drop in domestic auto sales in 1974 and sent the state into a deep recession. Intense competition from overseas automakers, who produced more fuel-efficient cars, cut further into Michigan's share of the market. These developments made clear to leaders in both the public and private sectors that it was necessary to further diversify Michigan's economy to reduce its dependency on the fortunes of the auto industry. Accordingly, the state has undergone a slow, but steady, economic restructuring since the mid-1970s. During the **1979-1982 recession**, the state lost over 300,000 of its manufacturing jobs. In contrast, service sector employment more than doubled between 1970 and 1990, generating over 530,000 new jobs. To establish and maintain a competitive position in a global economy, the state will likely continue this transition from a manufacturing to a service-oriented economy. With the changing nature of the technology and global strategies, even as the manufacturing sector recovers, there will likely be fewer of these types of jobs in the future. While many see this transition as necessary, it will not come without obstacles and challenges. Questions regarding life-styles, wages, and benefits will need to be addressed. However, Michigan's track record of adapting to change certainly bodes well for the future

School Finance Reform and Education

Property taxes have served as a major source of revenue for governments since the colonial days. Michigan's first comprehensive property tax law was enacted by the Territorial Legislature in 1817 and a property tax was imposed in 1835 to finance the state's first constitutional convention. Over time, property taxes became the principal source for funding the public schools. As the property tax burden grew heavier, citizens expressed a desire to address the problem. In 1978, voters approved a tax limitation amendment to the state constitution that restricted the growth of tax revenues, but this measure did not address education finance.

For years, Michigan's heavy reliance on local property taxes to fund education and inequities in spending among school districts generated attempts to reform the education finance system. From 1970 to 1994, voters rejected a dozen ballot proposals concerning money for education and/or property taxes! Countless legislative plans and proposals of citizens and groups on this issue were thwarted even before reaching the ballot. The issue received national media attention when a small rural school district in the northern part of the state closed its schools in March 1993, three months before the end of the usual school year, because it had exhausted its revenues. In 1993, when the Legislature enacted legislation eliminating local property taxes as a source of K-12 funding, it became necessary to adopt a new system to fund schools. This time, the electorate was presented with two options — either approve a plan increasing the state sales tax to make up the lost funding or allow a statutory plan relying on an increased state income tax to take effect. The option chosen by voters in every previous ballot question — maintaining the status quo — was not available. On March 15, 1994, voters overwhelmingly approved the sales tax plan.

Coinciding with the call for education finance reform was a demand for **educational reform**. Such movements have sprung up periodically in history. The latter part of the 19th century witnessed a drive to improve curricula and instructional methods that were judged to be inferior to methods used in Europe. A strong "back-to-basics" movement arose in the early 1950s and the enactment of the National Defense Education Act of 1958, a direct response to the Soviet Union's launching of Sputnik, signaled a change to a new curriculum that emphasized science and mathematics. When the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform in 1983, another educational reform movement was initiated, and Michigan has responded accordingly.

School reform legislation enacted during the 1990s has defined more specific objectives for Michigan's education system. A model core curriculum, implementation of school improvement plans, addressing the problems of "at risk" children, experimentation with schools of choice and charter schools, and new strategies to address troubled districts are among the reforms that have been encouraged. With the enactment at the federal level of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the entire nation has become committed to better preparing our rising generations for the challenges of global competition.

The New Millennium

At the dawn of the Twenty-First Century and the start of the new millennium, Michigan is a far different state than the one that greeted 1900. At that time, the work of several visionary mechanics was touching off the age of the auto for our country and the world. Led by this revolutionary device, the state was transformed from a farming and natural resource economy into a giant of heavy industry. For the first two-thirds of the century, Michigan's population skyrocketed.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, zooming fuel costs and other factors brought the painful realities of global competition and recession. Michigan lost population, as the number of manufacturing jobs both dropped dramatically and shifted to increased use of technology. Renewed efforts to diversify the economy and accentuate service sectors took root. By the year 2000, Michigan's solid recovery and low jobless rates reflect the resiliency that has marked the state's history. While the auto industry is still a key to our economic strength, aging plants are being replaced by a new generation of facilities. Workers are reaching new levels of training to use machines and materials Henry Ford could never have imagined.

Along with the reinvigoration of the Michigan economy, the population is rebounding. Major changes are taking place in how we work, what we do, and where the customers for our goods and services live. Our agriculture faces serious threats, and our ever-mobile society is making land use a key public policy concern for many. To deal with these challenges and to maintain the gains of recent years, the state is committed to strengthening our human resources. In the information age, just as in the ages of furs, mining, and manufacturing, it is these resources — nearly 10 million strong — that will shape Michigan's destiny.